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23 November 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Intelligence  
THROUGH : Director of Research and Reports  
SUBJECT : Estimates of Communist Manpower Losses in South Vietnam

1. This memorandum is responsive to a statement by Joseph Alsop that intelligence estimates of Communist manpower losses fail to cover all losses adequately, most particularly those due to disease and sickness.

2. The estimates of manpower losses currently accepted in the intelligence community are those prepared by ORR and used in NIE 14.3-66, "North Vietnamese Military Potential for Fighting in North Vietnam," and in the so-called McNamara II, "The Vietnamese Communists Will to Persist." Our estimated manpower losses use as a base MACV, J-2's estimates of KIA and captured, to which we add estimates of the number of seriously wounded, ralliers and deserters.

3. The current estimates of manpower losses do not include estimates of attrition due to disease and sickness. At the time the estimates were prepared we acknowledged that adequate data were not available to make such an estimate. An estimate of such attrition was prepared by ACSI but rejected during the NIE deliberations. The ACSI estimate was based on an inadequate sample of 7 documents. It was agreed, moreover, that estimating manpower losses involved so many unknowns and variables that estimating attrition due to disease and sickness represented an attempt to obtain an untenable specificity. Whatever the amount of attrition, it was undoubtedly well within the margin of error attributed to the over-all estimate.

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4. Since the estimates were prepared, the ORR Task Force has uncovered a fair amount of data shedding light on disease and sickness among Communist forces. A very preliminary judgment indicates this attrition might be in the order of 12,000 troops annually. If this judgment is confirmed, our estimate of losses would increase by about 10 percent, an increase well within the confidence limits of the original estimates.

[REDACTED]  
Chief, Trade and Services Division, ORR

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